

Testimony of Daniel Rivers
Before the Children's Committee
March 9, 2021

RE: SB 2 An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety and Education of Children

Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan and Members of the Children's Committee,

My name is Daniel Rivers. I am currently in my twelfth year as a high school mathematics teacher in Region 9 Public Schools. I write with strong concerns and opposition regarding *parts* of SB 2.

I implore the committee to amend the current language of the bill to explicitly state that virtual and hybrid learning models should be reserved *only* for emergency scenarios that necessitate a prolonged closure of school buildings. We should not be permitting virtual and hybrid learning as an ongoing method of instruction. They are not an adequate substitute for in-person learning.

It is my understanding from reading the current language that the proposed bill would:

1. Allow local BOEs to provide virtual/hybrid learning modalities with simple approval from the commissioner even after the pandemic is over (Sec 16)
2. Prohibit local BOEs from deeming absent (either excused or unexcused) a student who attends school remotely (Sec 18)

Virtual/hybrid learning models must not be permitted to be used in perpetuity. They should only be reserved for emergency scenarios. Even before a state-wide audit is conducted, my experience in the classroom this year has taught me, in short, the following about virtual and hybrid learning models:

- 1) It is not sustainable for educators and students
- 2) It is not as effective as an all in-person modality
- 3) It is not conducive to establishing a healthy community and social connections
- 4) It is detrimental to the mental health of some students
- 5) It adversely affects social-emotional learning
- 6) It is detrimental to accurate assessment of student mastery (assessment integrity)

Provisions that allow for virtual or hybrid learning post-pandemic strike me as particularly antithetical to the loud public outcry to 1) re-open schools *during* the pandemic because virtual learning is “so bad” and “doesn’t work”, etc. and 2) the general public sentiment, which is supported by scientific research, that increased screen-time is determinantal to child development. Further perplexing is the explicit language in section 18 that prohibits virtual attendees from being marked absent from school—either excused or unexcused. What message does this send to our students and families about the importance of education?

As with all things, the outside observer never quite understands the nuances, but take it from an informed professional in the classroom (who *is* adept in technology)—virtual/hybrid learning is substandard, unfair and unsustainable. Educators across the state have been working tirelessly to simultaneously juggle two distinctly different

modalities; the nuanced differences and intricacies of which far outstretch the intended length of this letter. If the State and local BOEs believe in the power and fidelity of virtual learning platforms, then they cannot continue to expect individual teachers to do the work of what is really needed—two teachers. One for in-person instruction/classes, and one for virtual. If the parties are interested in having both modalities then they should fund, train and support TWO systems and TWO groups of teachers that are dedicated to each respectively.

Pre-pandemic, if one were to bring up virtual learning platforms, I'm certain there would have been commissions, research, community panels, and input from all stakeholders. Pilot programs, debriefs, surveys and analysis. Perhaps such a process would have taken one, two or even more years before implementation state-wide. Yes, the global pandemic has thrust us into this emergency scenario, but for such an important and complex issue, how can we simply continue forward with virtual and hybrid learning without the analysis, study and planning it is worth? We can not simply continue in these methods while being told, explicitly and implicitly, to "make it work."

Instead of SB 2 simply granting local BOEs the right to continue virtual and hybrid learning modalities in *non*-emergency times, it would be better to establish a commission to fully analyze such platforms and make scientifically based recommendations for their use going forward in non-emergency times.

Simply put, the pandemic isn't even over, many stakeholders "hate" virtual/hybrid learning, your boots on the ground—teachers—are telling you it isn't the way to do things, yet SB 2 simply allows such a complicated system to continue as an option going forward with a mere *eight* line amendment in one bill?

I thank you for considering amending section 16 and section 18.

With respect for your work and service to our State and children,

Daniel Rivers



Southbury, CT

Cc: Senator Berthel and Representative Labriola